

# **Long Range Planning Committee**

## **Report on Fall 2005 Survey Results**

### **I. Introduction**

The Long Range Planning Committee undertook a survey of Town residents on issues facing the Town in the Fall of 2005. To hold costs down, the questionnaire was largely distributed at the Town Hall on Election Day in November and on-line. About 253 responses were received, although not everyone answered every question. The full set of responses is available through the Town's website, and is summarized here. The compilation of the responses, which does not include comments added to the questionnaire, is not included in this Report but was submitted with the Report to the Selectmen.

The last such questionnaire was done by the Comprehensive Planning Committee in 1991. For comparison purposes, the Long Range Planning Committee included a set of basic questions in approximately the same form as the 1991 questionnaire. A Table showing the comparison responses is attached as Appendix 1.

Although generally the response to the questionnaire was satisfactory and comparable to the number of responses in 1991, any sampling is likely to be distorted in various ways. As we look at these results, the Long Range Planning Committee can identify several groups whose opinions are likely to be over-reported or under-reported. These include:

**Voters** were more likely to fill out the questionnaire as it was primarily handed out at the polling place on Election Day. For planning purposes, of course, a bias towards likely voters may be acceptable. Similarly, with about one-third of the responses coming in via the internet, it is possible that **computer-savvy people** were over-represented. **Retired people** made up about 30% of respondents and may be over-represented. Because of the time of year the survey was circulated, there were very few responses from **seasonal residents**.

Generally speaking, the respondents were year-round residents and homeowners. They spanned the range for years lived in Lamoine, with 40% having been here less than 12 years and about the same number having been here more than 20 years. About one-third (83) work in Ellsworth, with somewhat fewer working on MDI (64) and in Lamoine (44).

### **II. The Process That Led to this Report**

The Long Range Planning Committee has met several times to discuss these results. The purpose of those discussions was to develop an understanding of the issues of concern to those who responded. This involved looking at sequences of questions on related topics and picking out patterns of responses. After two such sessions, we assigned members of the committee to draft an analysis of each subject area. We then reviewed these as a group and agreed on a final draft.

### **III. Areas of Inquiry Which do not Appear to be Concerns**

Inevitably there were some questions that did not generate a strong response, and the committee spent relatively little time on them. These included:

**Regionalization of Fire Protection** (only 53 respondents (21%) in favor even if it cut costs)

**A Change from Town Meeting to Council form of Government** (17 respondents in favor (7%), 236 against (93%))

**Likelihood of Use of a “Park and Ride” System** (only 19 respondents (8%) “likely” or “very likely” responses)

**Conversion to “Pay-As-you-Throw” payments for trash:** (98 would support it (39%))

### **IV. Safety Concerns**

Several questions on the survey related to safety concerns, including:

1. Speeding on community roadways
2. The need to add bike and walking lanes to our roadways
3. Alcohol and drug abuse in the community
4. The need for increased law enforcement

Analysis of the responses immediately makes clear that safety issues are at the forefront of the concerns expressed in the survey. Speeding as well as other motor vehicle infractions are frequent concerns noted. References to the need for increased law enforcement by county and state police as a means to make Lamoine roads safer are prevalent. Nearly 50% of the respondents enjoy bicycle riding while nearly 95% percent report that they or family members enjoy walking. Our narrow roadways do not offer a safe place to walk or to ride a bicycle leading 78% of the respondents to recommend that bike lanes be added to roads as they are reconstructed. Concern about the increase in drug and alcohol abuse in our community was rated as important to very important by 76% of the respondents. This appears to mirror the alarming trend that is developing in our state where for the first time more people died last year from drug abuse than died from traffic accidents. Nearly half of the respondents (121, or 48%) favored exploring regionalization of law enforcement services.

### **V. Conservation and Open Space Concerns**

There was a lot of support for maintaining a rural, non-industrial, Lamoine. More respondents listed “Beauty of Woods and Sea” as one of their primary reasons for moving to Lamoine than any other reason (194 or 69%). In response to the question “How important do you rate protection of open space and environmental protection of land an [sic] future of

Lamoine?” and overwhelming number of respondents rated this as “Very Important” or “Important” (225 or 89%).

Many responses to these questions and some of the recreational questions, and particularly the comments that some respondents made to supplement their answers, showed a strong sense of loss as Lamoine grows. Many of these losses, like loss of a favorite view, or walking path or hunting privileges or access to the shore for clamming, worming or musseling, occur due to changes on land not owned by the respondent. That is, to keep those aspects of Lamoine which we treasure is not possible simply through individual ownership of a lot in Town.

This gave rise to what may be the largest surprise in the results. The question was asked: “Would you support the acquisition of land for the following uses: Public Recreation; Public shore access points; landscape protection easements.” There were significant votes in favor of each: Public recreation (154, or 61%), Public Shore Access Points (162 or 64%); and Landscape Protection Easements (115 or 45%). Even more striking, most people did not support all three items, and so the total number of people who support public land acquisition of some sort was 196, or 77%. Of course, this support is offered in the abstract, without a specific proposal with a specific price tag, but nonetheless this is a noteworthy endorsement of the need to think realistically about the long-term future of Lamoine and to take some proactive steps to secure the land assets which we will need to assure access to the woods and shore and beauty of Lamoine.

A question about concern over the future quality and quantity of drinking water got a strong response (212 or 84% either “Very Concerned” or “Concerned.”). Although abundant pure drinking water seems like a Maine birthright, there are a number of threats to Maine’s drinking water over the next generation. Continued research into and consideration of reasonable, measured steps to protect the sand and gravel aquifer under Lamoine make sense and get a significant mandate from the respondents to the questionnaire.

## **VI. School Issues**

Of the 215 people who have an opinion on the importance of the school being physically located in town, 135 people, a clear majority of 63%, thought it was either important or very important, 80 people thought it was not very important or unimportant. There were 34 people who had no opinion. It is important to note that 78% of those surveyed do not have children living in their homes and still they supported the school being in town. This suggested that local public education is a value held by this community. When it came to funding school improvements the numbers were lower. There was reasonable support, 41% for funding improving the gym/event facility and replacing portable class rooms. Only 24% were interested in funding a new school parking lot. As our survey may over represent retired people who are on a fixed income, funding questions may be a harder sell. Nonetheless they do express support for the school being located in town. A final interesting note is that the majority of those surveyed, 63%, did not support cutting costs through school consolidation. This response also indicates solid community support for our local school.

## **VII. Development and Recreation**

Rather surprisingly only a small percentage of people expressed the opinion that development has altered their pattern of participation in recreational activities within the town. The most common form of local recreation cited was walking. 213 people, 84% of those surveyed, walk in Lamoine. Of these 213 only 22% (47), have found development has altered their walking habits. On the other hand hunters have experienced an impact from development. Though hunting ranked 9th in chosen activities with 17% of the population being hunters, 77% of them (34) voiced a negative impact made by development. This represents 13% of the total 253. Respondents in each recreational activity common in town included at least one person who felt their recreational activity had been affected by development. However, taking respondents as a whole, only a small percentage of people are currently feeling negatively impacted by development. This data does provide evidence that a good majority of our population participates in recreational activities in town. Long range planning goals for the Town should include preserving the level of access to recreational opportunities we currently enjoy.

## **VIII. Waste Management Issues**

As noted above, Pay-As-You-Throw received support from less than one-half the respondents. It is possible that part of this response is due to a lack of understanding about the tax savings involved in Pay-As-You-Throw, but there certainly is no mandate to pursue it at this time.

On the other hand, there was significant support for attempting to cut costs through regionalization (205 or 81%). The Town should keep in touch with the changing regional landscape for trash recycling and disposal and be open to new approaches which may save the town tax dollars.

## **IX. Business Development Concerns**

Presently Lamoine has a number of different types of businesses ranging from boat building to bread baking, and the contribution they make to the Town's tax base varies greatly. Business personal property in Lamoine was most recently valued at \$2,081,700 (4/1/05 valuations) with the largest payer of business personal property tax in Lamoine being Bangor Hydro. This generated \$15,196.41 in taxes for the Town. There has been some talk at the state level of eliminating the tax on business property. If this change were to take place, the tax benefits of a larger business presence to the Town would diminish but it's important to keep in mind that the benefits of a thriving diverse business community are not limited to the amount of tax revenue collected by the Town. Other benefits include the economic well being of business owners, employment opportunities to Lamoine residents and availability of quality goods and services for local consumers. All of these factors lead to increased property development and improvement which increases the Town's tax base and responsibilities.

One point of interest the committee noted in the survey results was the strong support for

a committee to look at possible zoning changes to include a commercial/industrial zone within Lamoine (136 “Yes” responses, or 54%). After some discussion, the committee thought that it would be better to recommend the formation of an Economic Development Committee as an advisory body for the Town of Lamoine. This committee could look at the topic of economic growth within Lamoine as a whole and not limit its work to simple zoning changes. While the committee might also recommend the types of businesses that strike a balance between the Town’s character and business requirements, we feel a committee whose sole focus is fostering businesses that meet that goal would be beneficial to the Town.

## **X. Lamoine’s Town Government**

Also as noted above, there was very little support for changing Lamoine’s Town Meeting form of government. There was solid support for moving from appointed to elected boards: Planning Board (157 or 62%); Board of Appeals (160 or 63%) and Budget Committee (148 or 58%). The Long Range Planning Committee believes that while these results clearly show a preference for elections, they do not really make a case for moving to elected boards. There were, for example, no gripes or other comments about appointed boards, which was very unusual as most issues generated comments, often very forcefully expressed. It is the opinion of the Long Range Planning Committee that moving to elected Boards should not, in the absence of a petition drive or other show of strong feeling by the citizens of Lamoine, be a priority for Town government at this time.

## **XI. Conclusion**

While every measure of public opinion has its flaws, the Long Range Planning Committee is convinced that there is enough validity to the results summarized above to justify further efforts. The Committee intends to continue to meet to articulate long-range goals or options for Lamoine. The immediate next step for the Committee will be to examine the Town’s current Comprehensive Plan which is more than ten years old, and recommend to the Town either that the Plan be revised or that it be supplemented by other planning tools.

February 21, 2006

The Lamoine Long Range Planning Committee

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